

2012 Iowa Agricultural Overview

Crops and Weather Summary

The 2012 crop season got off to an early start in April with sunshine and above normal temperatures. Despite rain and storms during the middle of the month, corn planting progressed rapidly. By the end of the month, 50 percent of corn had been planted, ahead of the previous year's 7 percent. Oats were 98 percent planted and 76 percent emerged, both generously ahead of the previous year's percentages and the five year average.

May began with persistent rain that slowed planting progress. The rest of the month provided dry weather which helped advance crop progress, but left soil moistures dry in the South. The corn crop was 95 percent emerged by the end of May, and soybeans were 97 percent planted with 66 percent emerged. Thirty-five percent of the oat crop was headed, over 2 weeks ahead of normal. Alfalfa first cutting was 72 percent complete; substantially ahead of the average 12 percent.

Despite varied rainfall during the month of June, there was still a favorable 23.5 days suitable for fieldwork throughout the month. Some areas were still in need of more rain resulting in crop conditions declining the first three weeks of the month. By the end of the month, topsoil and subsoil moisture rated 73 percent very short to short. Sixty-eight percent of the oat crop had turned color, well ahead the average of 24 percent. Twenty percent of the oat crop was harvested, two weeks ahead of normal. The second cutting of alfalfa, at 76 percent complete, was almost three weeks ahead of normal.

Farmers endured dry and hot conditions during July, and crop conditions suffered. The state averaged 6.3 degrees above normal for the month. Topsoil and subsoil moisture levels rated near 100 percent very short to short during the month, aiding to the decline in crop conditions. Farmers began to chop corn for silage towards the end of the month. Ninety-seven percent of the corn crop was silking, well ahead of the 77 percent average. Eight percent of the corn crop had reached the dent stage, the most advanced the crop had been at this time since 1987. Ninety-three percent of the soybean crop had bloomed, 8 percentage points ahead of normal. Third cutting of alfalfa was 63 percent complete, just over a month ahead of normal. Oat harvest had reached 98 percent, significantly ahead of last year's 66 percent and the average of 55 percent.

August received widespread rainfall throughout most of the month. Temperatures fell below normal, offering some relief, but quickly returned to almost 7 degrees above normal by the end of the month. Soil moisture supplies improved slightly during the month due to the rain. Dry and warm weather the last week of August promoted rapid progression of Iowa's drought-damaged crops. By the end of August, 91 percent of the corn had reached the dent stage and 50 percent of the crop was mature, 39 percentage points ahead of the normal. Corn harvesting was off to an early start with 5 percent complete, when normally harvesting would not occur at this time. Fifty-one percent of the soybeans had turned color, ahead of the average of 22 percent. The third cutting of alfalfa continued to be a month ahead of normal with 98 percent complete.

Harvesting progressed to well above normal percentages, thanks to dry conditions during September. Temperatures started falling and the cold weather towards the end of the month brought a freeze to 80 percent of the state, the earliest widespread freeze since 1983. By the end of September, 56 percent of the corn acres had been harvested, ahead of the average 8 percent. Soybean acres harvested was 54 percent complete, well ahead of 2011's 16 percent. Some Iowa farmers were getting a fourth and even fifth cutting of alfalfa, and fall tillage was underway in some areas.

Dry and warm weather at the beginning of October quickly turned to cool and rainy. The much-needed rain helped improve the soil moisture levels, but slowed the progression of harvest. By the end of October, corn was 95 percent harvested, 40 percentage points above average. Soybean harvest was 97 percent complete, 2 weeks ahead of the normal pace. As the harvest season neared completion, 99 percent of the State reported adequate or surplus off-farm storage capacity and 97 percent on-farm storage capacity.

Temperatures in November fluctuated often, ranging from a high of 72 degrees to a low temperature of 7 degrees. Lack of rain was concerning to farmers as soil moisture levels remained mostly very short to short. Farmers were eager to finish applying fertilizer before hard freezing occurred. Very few fields had yet to be harvested by the end of the month. Grain movement was slow by the end of the month, with only 17 percent of the State seeing moderate to heavy grain movement from farm to elevator. Hay supplies were considered short across 41 percent of Iowa with 37 percent of the hay supply considered to be in good condition.